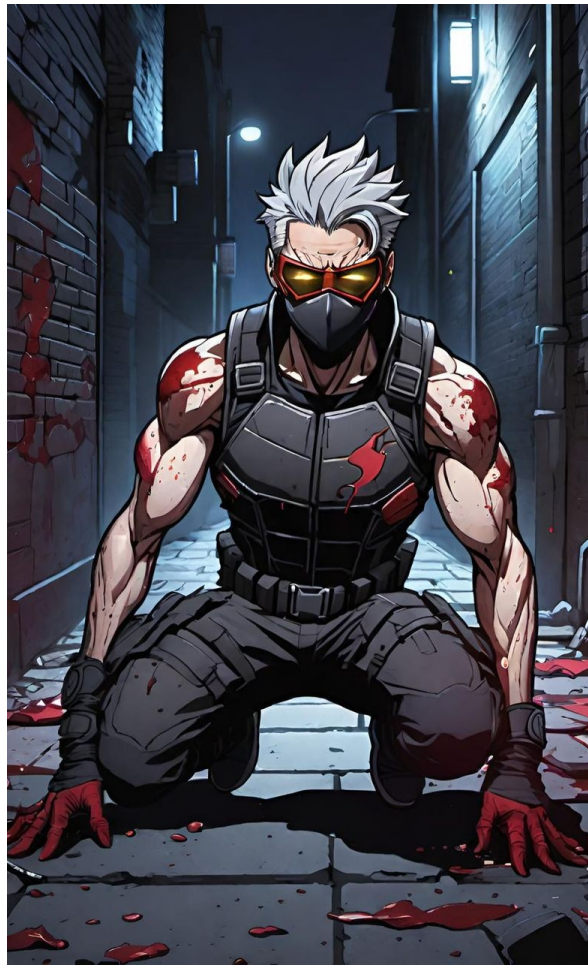


It is dark, a narrow space between buildings. The putrid smell of human waste is overwhelming, as the area is littered with garbage disposal bins. Dozens of mice scurry around, feasting on the leftover scraps. The alleyway is long and narrow, with shadows dancing on the walls. Outside, the noise of sirens blaring from police cars can be heard, indicating a frantic chase as they search for someone.



Suddenly, a dustbin toppled over with a loud thud, echoing through the narrow alleyway. Three figures emerged, desperately searching for a place to hide. Two of them were supporting a third, who was barely able to stand. It was 4am, and the faint moonlight revealed

their faces. Mid-Nite, covered in blood, his black vest now a deep crimson, with blood dripping from his mouth and his eyes half-closed, was being held up by Immortal and Blur - that's me.

"What do we do now?!" Immortal screamed, his voice filled with urgency and fear.



"I don't know, everything happened so... so fast," I exclaimed in pain as blood started dripping from my ankle.

"FAST?! For you?! Oh please! You messed up and yo-" Immortal's voice was filled with frustration.

"Calm the hell down, Ahnaf! It was no-" Blur tried to interject, but Immortal cut him off.

"No, you listen! We had a plan, and you went off script! Now look at Mid-Nite! He's barely hanging on!" Immortal's voice cracked with a mix of anger and desperation.

"Off script? Are you kidding me? I did what I had to do to save us! If I hadn't acted, we'd all be dead by now!" Blur shot back, his voice rising.

"Save us? You call this saving us? We're cornered, bleeding, and Mid-Nite is dying! How is this saving us?!" Immortal's eyes blazed with fury.

The quarrel kept going on and on, two friends blaming each other for something that was not any of their fault. The structure that we made was nothing but a house of cards, one little slip and it all came crashing down, and slip it did. But the slip was not caused by any of us. The slip was caused by an outside force, and it all came down. So let me tell you how it all began.



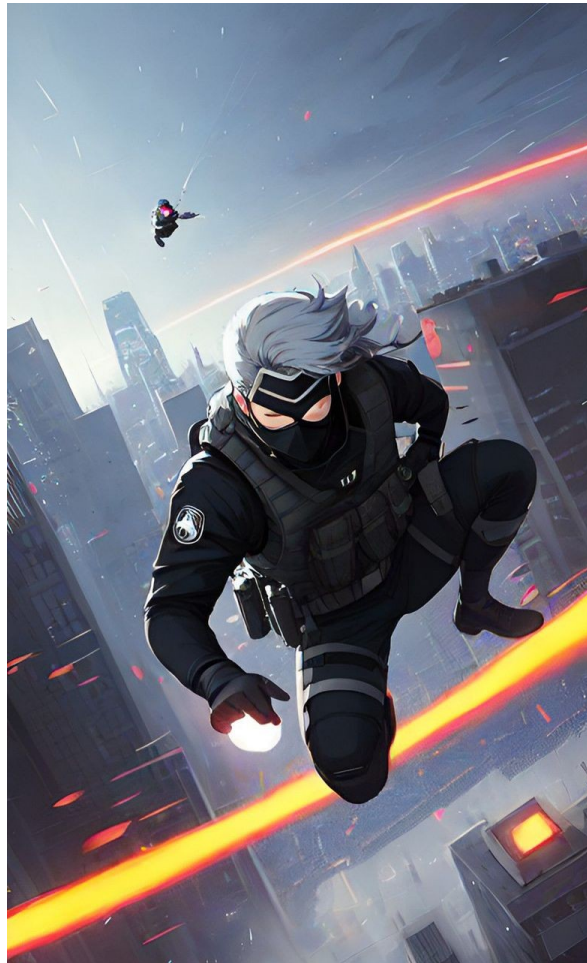
Heavy winds were blowing atop the skyscraper, and tiny snowflakes began to fall, while the sky lit up with each burst of firecrackers. Mid-Nite was looking at the three-story-high bank in the distance as we prepared with our parachutes.

Mid-Nite, after securing his parachute, asked, "You all ready?"

Immortal and I exchanged a glance and replied in unison, "Yes, all is ready!"

"Then let's get this party started," Mid-Nite said, gesturing for Immortal to throw him up in the air.

Immortal grabbed Mid-Nite by his tactical jacket, twirled him around, and launched him high into the air towards the bank. Next, it was my turn. I moved towards Immortal, and he did the same for me. The experience was intense - flying that high up in the air and slowly descending was truly exhilarating. I couldn't help but let out a scream as I felt butterflies in my stomach. Immortal soon followed by jumping himself. He couldn't travel as fast as we could, so he made up for it by jumping higher than us. Within a few quick seconds, we got the cue to open our parachutes.





We opened our parachutes and began slowly descending towards the roof of the bank. The city below, the sky above - everything felt so beautiful from up here. It was mesmerizing. I couldn't believe this is what Sentinel experiences every day as he flies. We landed on the roof shortly after, and Immortal gestured to us, indicating that the time had started. He threw a small disc-shaped object onto the nearby antenna and whispered, "NOW!!!"



**10 minutes left.** I got my cue and started my stopwatch. I quickly began running, feeling time slow down as I accelerated. Mid-Nite and Immortal followed closely behind. Each snowflake seemed to

hang in the air, frozen in time, as if the world had come to a standstill. I dashed through the nearby electric door, already open due to the disabled security.

Descending swiftly, I spotted two security guards. I moved behind them and delivered precise blows to the back of their heads, rendering them unconscious. Without wasting a breath, I continued running, ensuring not even a millisecond was wasted. I raced towards the security room on the third floor, the layout etched in my mind from the blueprint Mid-Nite had shown us.

The security room was small, with five guards present. Three were engrossed in the security cameras, while the other two were pouring coffee. I grabbed a nearby baton and ran along the wall, striking each guard with precision, ensuring they lost consciousness as I slowed down. Exhaustion began to creep in, but I pushed myself harder. I took a second to memorize the locations of every guard on the security cameras before unplugging the cable to shut them off.

Bursting out of the security room, I moved swiftly and silently, taking down each guard one by one. I glanced at my smartwatch - only 10 seconds had passed. I quickly rechecked every floor and room, ensuring no one was left. Then, I began searching for the vault. It was located on the ground floor, hidden behind a bookcase. Thanks to the blueprint, it was easy to find. I pressed the nearby button and slowed down, feeling time return to its normal flow. I pinged Immortal and Mid-Nite to join me. Within seconds, they arrived as the bookcase slid open, revealing the lift.

**9 minutes left.** Now comes the boring part - all we have to do is stand inside the elevator. Immortal and Mid-Nite step inside as I follow, panting in exhaustion from all the running I did back there. We press the ground floor button and start descending. Immortal looks at me, holding my legs as I catch my breath.

"Are you OK, bro?" Immortal asks, concern in his voice.

"Huff hufffff, I am... okay... now," I reply, slowly catching my breath.

"What? You're tired already? We have more work to do. Come on. Get yourself together!" Mid-Nite says, slightly annoyed.

"Shut up! I'd like to see you try running at God knows what speed and remain standing!" Immortal snaps back, his frustration evident.

"Well, I for one am not some adrenaline junkie running off from some government experiment. So of course, I shouldn't know and shouldn't care!" Mid-Nite retorts with frustration.

"How dare you! You don't know anything about us. I'll show you!" I scream, equally frustrated.

Immortal tries to defend me, "Hey, come on, Mid-Nite. Blur's doing his best. You know how tough it is for him."

Mid-Nite smirks, "Oh, really? Tough for him? He's the fastest among us. If he can't handle it, who can?"



Immortal sighs, "It's not just about speed, Mid-Nite. It's about endurance and strategy too."

Mid-Nite chuckles, "Endurance? Strategy? Please, Immortal. Blur's just a speedster. He needs to learn to pace himself."

As soon as the door opens, I burst out at super speed, annoyed by Mid-Nite's words. Anger in my eyes, I start searching the entire room faster than ever before.

Mid-Nite looks at Immortal and smiles, "See, all he needed was just a little push, and off he goes again."

Immortal sighs, "Ugh, you are evil."

Mid-Nite grins, "Evil? Nah, just motivational."



**7 minutes left.** The entire room was bathed in a deep yellow light. Hundreds of large, wide steel cabinets lined the walls. Everything was so massive that it could take ages to find the documents we were looking for - like searching for a needle in a haystack. But fortunately, I was there, and we had 2 minutes. Within those two minutes, I was confident I could find what we needed. I started running, searching each and every container, every shelf, every box. Inside them were paintings, money, jewelry, and various gemstones, but none of them contained what we were looking for.

Despite my inhuman speed, a minute had already passed. Just then, Mid-Nite gestured for me to look at the far corner where a single, large lockbox lay. I quickly ran towards it and opened it. Inside, we found newspaper clippings, pictures, a diary, and charts. The newspaper clippings spoke of a strange alien aircraft-like object, circular in shape, that had crashed near a farmland area. The pictures showed a strange man, 8 feet tall, ripped with muscles and bulked in shape, wearing a bone mask, walking through the forest. The next pictures showed the strange man shaking hands with some men in suits - possibly members of the Heartlands. The diary stated:

*1980...*

*We encountered a man who looked completely otherworldly. His figure was imposing, and his presence was intimidating. We attempted to eliminate him, but he was far too powerful. Our bullets had no effect on him. He punched Sammy with such force that the poor chap was sent flying 100 feet into the air. His strength was beyond anything we had ever seen.*

*Terrified, we surrendered. We pleaded with him to let us go, explaining that we were just a group of simple crooks. To our surprise, he said he didn't want to hurt us. He was searching for someone. He promised to make us rich and help us get back on our feet if we cooperated with him. Desperate and intrigued, we agreed.*

*He introduced himself as Khan. He became our first leader, and that marked the beginning of the Heartlands.*



*1985...*

*That day, various parts of the USA were shrouded in mysterious mist storms. The news was abuzz with reports of these unusual weather phenomena. Upon seeing this, Khan decided to leave for the USA. We were curious and asked him what it was all about. He explained that something ominous was happening, and he believed that amidst the chaos, the person he was searching for would be there.*

*With a sense of urgency, he departed, leaving us behind. We haven't seen him since.*



**1995...**

*We caught a glimpse of Khan on the television, in New York, during another fog incident. He was engaged in a fierce battle with someone of equal strength, but there was a significant difference - the other man could fly, whereas Khan could not. The clash was catastrophic, with buildings collapsing and each punch generating massive shockwaves that created huge dust storms from the debris.*

*The fight lasted such a long time, but as the dust settled, Khan was nowhere to be seen. The man who fought Khan later introduced himself as the Sentinel, declaring that he was here to protect the world from alien threats.*



**1998...**

*With Khan gone for such a long time, we gradually began to lose our way. We had a new leader now. He never revealed his real name, insisting that we refer to him simply as "The Boss." None of us minded, of course, as he was a genius. Initially, we were merely*



*offering protection from other gangs. But soon, our tactics evolved. We started demanding protection money and, before long, began investing in small businesses, ensuring they lost revenue so they would be forced to pay us double.*

*The Santosa, Brown, Clerkson, and Sohail businesses were our first targets. We orchestrated their downfall meticulously, manipulating their finances and creating situations where they had no choice but to turn to us for help. And so, it all began. Under The Boss's leadership, the Heartlands transformed from a group of simple crooks into a powerful and feared criminal organization.*



2000...

*A strange alien aircraft, circular in shape, crashed near the farmlands. By the time we arrived at the crash site, whatever was inside the craft had already left. We found car tracks leading away from the road, suggesting that someone had taken whatever was inside. However, that was the least of our concerns as we began to hear the distant wail of sirens approaching.*

*Zain, one of our members, claimed to have seen a tall figure lurking in the woods, observing the crash site. The thought crossed our*

*minds - could it be him? Could it be Khan? But we quickly dismissed the idea. If Khan were still alive, he would have returned to us by now. The figure in the woods remained a mystery, adding to the growing unease among us.*

*As the sirens grew louder, we knew we had to leave the area quickly. The crash site was soon swarming with authorities, and we couldn't afford to be caught. The incident left us with more questions than answers, and the possibility of Khan's return lingered in our minds, haunting us with uncertainty.*



2005...

*Zain betrayed us. He absconded with all the documents and evidence of our crimes. I knew we should have kept those somewhere safe. Zain was the best of us; we taught him how to fight - martial arts, jujutsu, you name it. All these years, he was our muscle. But I suppose family is far more important to him, even after all these years, huh? I want him dead!*

*He fled on his motorbike, and we pursued him in our cars, heading south towards the mountains. It was the dead of night, and we fired at him from our vehicles. He might have been hit twice, but he didn't stop. Eventually, his adrenaline gave out, and he crashed his bike, scattering all the documents. He then started running towards the mountain trail. We continued the chase on foot.*

*At last, we confronted him near the edge of a slope. He had nowhere to run. We demanded to know why he had done this, knowing there was no chance of him escaping us, no matter how far he went. With anger in his eyes, he screamed, "I love my family, and I will take every chance I have to get back to them... Because... Because nobody else will!"*

*And then, The Boss shot him in the chest. He fell down the slope, never to be seen again. What a waste.*



2010...

*I don't know why The Boss has taken such an interest in Zain's family. I see him spending more time with Zain's son than with us, disguised as some family physician. Not that we are afraid - we are running things well, and the money is flowing in - but it just seems strange to see The Boss this way.*

*As for me, I seem to have gained too much weight, ha-ha. I guess the profit has gotten to me!*



2015...

*Some rat has been sniffing around us, and we don't know who it is. I've seen shadows lurking on top of buildings, in the forests, and wherever we go. It's unsettling, to say the least. Once I find out who it is, I'm going to rip his eyes out! But for now, I'm going to let him play his little game and see what happens. As long as we have the documents hidden, nothing can harm us.*

*The shadows have been persistent, always one step behind us. It's as if they know our every move. The Boss is aware of the situation,*



*but he seems unbothered, confident that our secrets are safe. We've tightened security, but the feeling of being watched never goes away. The tension among us is palpable, and trust is wearing thin.*

*We've tried to track the intruder, setting traps and laying ambushes, but they always manage to slip away. It's infuriating. The Boss believes it's just a matter of time before we catch them, but I can't shake the feeling that this rat is more than just a nuisance. There's something more to this, something we haven't figured out yet.*

*For now, we continue with our operations, always looking over our shoulders. The documents remain hidden, our safeguard against any threat. But the shadows persist, and the game continues. One day, we'll uncover the truth, and when we do, there will be no mercy.*

*2017...*

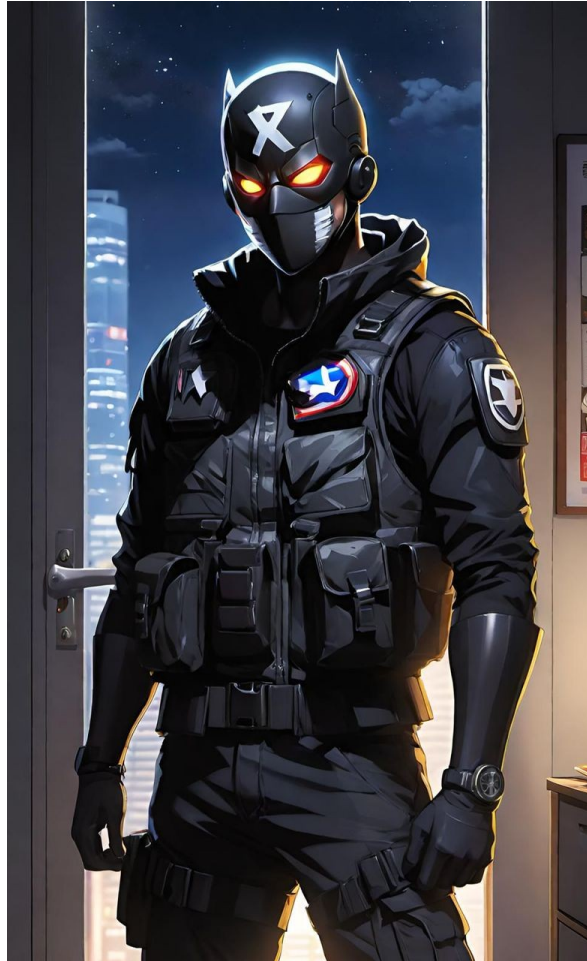
*Several of our safe houses and crime points have been raided by a vigilante who calls himself Mid-Nite. I'm certain this is the same rat who has been watching us for years. It's my fault - I should have realized that he wouldn't rely on the law to bring us down. How does one man manage to do all this? We must stop him now!*

*Mid-Nite has been a relentless thorn in our side, dismantling our operations with precision and skill. His attacks are methodical and calculated, striking fear into the hearts of our men. He seems to know our every move, always one step ahead, and his presence is like a shadow that never leaves.*

*The men are growing restless, their confidence shaken by this elusive vigilante. We've tried to track him down, setting traps and laying ambushes, but he always slips through our fingers, like a ghost in the night. His ability to evade capture is infuriating, and it's clear that he is no ordinary adversary.*

*The Boss is furious, demanding that we put an end to this menace once and for all. We've increased our security, doubled our efforts, and yet Mid-Nite continues to outsmart us. His knowledge of our operations is unsettling, and it's as if he has eyes everywhere.*

*The whispers among the men are growing louder, questioning our leadership and our ability to protect them. We can't afford to let this continue. The very foundation of our organization is at risk, and we must find a way to stop Mid-Nite before he brings everything crashing down.*



2018...

*The Boss has become increasingly desperate since Khan's return. There is a significant clash between his methods and ours. Khan has given the Boss a year to wrap things up, and we are now nearing the end of that period. The Boss isn't someone who easily succumbs to threats, and I am certain he has something planned. However, the problems seem to be mounting.*

*First, our men made a grave mistake by shooting Zain's kid. Then, there are now three vigilantes disrupting all our operations. It feels*

*like we are teetering on the brink of destruction. The tension is palpable, and the stakes have never been higher.*

*The 10th of January is the final day. The Boss and Khan will have their last meeting at our most secure outpost, Steady Acres, our farmhouse. This meeting will determine our fate. Will we find a way to reconcile, or will everything come crashing down? The uncertainty is overwhelming.*

*As we approach this critical juncture, I can't help but feel that everything is coming to an end. It seems prudent to store this diary somewhere safe. This might be my final entry. If we don't disband, perhaps I will write more. But for now, this is goodbye.*



That was all there was written. It was a lot to take in. This was probably the biggest revelation, and if the police got hold of this, the Heartlands would be done for. Around me, I saw Immortal clenching his fists, his eyes filling with tears.

"I... I always hated my... father... But I never knew that all this time he was the one suffering from all the pain... I just wish I had known sooner..." Immortal said, wiping his tears.

Mid-Nite, shocked, asked, "Your father??? What do you mean? Zain is your... father?"

Immortal replied, "Ugh... I'm sorry. We weren't supposed to know our personal lives, I... But how do you know Zain?"

Mid-Nite widened his eyes, "Because... Bec-"

The lift door opened with a ping. Upon hearing that, I instantly grabbed all the documents and got inside the elevator. From inside, I screamed, "You guys coming?!"

They both ran towards the elevator, their voices echoing, "YES!"

3 minutes left. The documents we have right now are going to be the nail in the coffin for the Heartlands, but I don't know if we can even trust the cops with this. Mid-Nite suddenly started laughing, tears streaming down his face inside the elevator.

"Heh... hehehe... This... this is probably the best day of my life..."

"What happened? Are you crazy?" I asked, bewildered by his reaction.

"Oh, shut up... heh... you wouldn't understand... but right now, at this very moment... I have achieved everything... in my life," Mid-Nite replied, his voice filled with a mix of joy and relief.

"And how is that?" I asked, still confused.

Mid-Nite placed his hand on Immortal's shoulder and smiled, "You all will see, when we return..."



Just as he said it, the elevator door slid open and... a grenade came flying inside. I was too late to stop it; it was already cooked and exploded with a huge bang! Nobody had time to react. But even amidst the chaos, Mid-Nite was fast enough to shield me from the impact by covering me with his back, ensuring I was not harmed.

The force of the explosion flung us all back against the wall. As the dust began to settle, I saw Immortal clutching his chest, a large red spot spreading around the area, spilling blood. His face was contorted in pain, and he struggled to stay on his feet. Mid-Nite was almost unconscious, his tactical vest torn to shreds from the blast. He lay on the ground, breathing heavily, his eyes half-closed.

The elevator was filled with smoke and debris, the acrid smell of burnt metal and explosives hanging in the air. My ears were ringing from the explosion, and my vision was blurred. I could barely make out the figures of my friends through the haze.

**1-minute left.** I glanced outside and saw dozens of men in black jumpsuits and tactical jackets. They were all pointing their guns at us, and red laser sights dotted our bodies. As my ears stopped ringing, I could hear them shouting:

**"GET DOWN!"**

**"DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE!"**

**"PUT YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM!"**

The men were highly trained, moving with precision and purpose. Their black jumpsuits were equipped with various tactical gear,

including holsters, utility belts, and body armor. Their faces were stern and focused, eyes scanning for any signs of resistance. The red laser sights from their weapons created an eerie, almost surreal atmosphere, emphasizing the gravity of the situation. The commands were clear and authoritative, leaving no room for hesitation.



Maybe it had always been a trap. Maybe Dr. Ramsey had tipped these people off. They seemed to be SWAT. I looked back and saw Immortal slowly recovering. While he was healing, I knew I had to do everything I could to protect both of them.

With a deep breath, I started running. Dozens of bullets erupted from their guns, each one moving in slow motion as they closed in on us. I sprinted towards the nearby bookcase, throwing it between the bullets and the lift with all my strength. Then, I dashed behind each of the SWAT operatives, smacking their heads as hard as I could. But the bullets kept coming. Some pierced through the bookcase, whizzing past me.

I grabbed a nearby steel tray and used it to deflect the remaining bullets one by one. The clang of metal against metal echoed through the room. But that wasn't the end. Another batch of SWAT operatives appeared, shooting at us from the nearby windows. The situation was becoming overwhelming. My speed began to falter, and the bullets that once seemed slow started moving faster and faster.

I was on the edge, but I pushed through. I threw the tray at the line of bullets, stopping a few, but there were just too many. Desperation fueled my actions as I ran back and covered the elevator door with as many tables as I could find. The sound of bullets ricocheting off the tables filled the air.

Just as I thought I had a moment of respite, a stray bullet penetrated my ankle. Pain shot through my leg, and I stumbled into the elevator, slamming to the ground. I screamed in agony,

"AAAGGGGGHHHHH!!!"

The elevator doors began to close, but the fight wasn't over. The SWAT operatives were relentless, their bullets still pounding against the makeshift barricade. I could hear the shouts and commands outside, the chaos of the battle raging on. My vision blurred from the pain..

**0 minutes left.** the situation outside the elevator was dire. Dozens of SWAT operatives had flooded the area, their guns trained on the makeshift barricade of tables I had hastily assembled. The tension was palpable, and I could feel the weight of their stares.



Suddenly, one of the tables was blasted away by an unseen force. Out came Immortal, his hands clenched into fists and his eyes burning with anger. He leaped towards the group, delivering a powerful punch to one of the operatives' guts. With incredible agility, he slid under another's legs and kicked the officer in front of him. Bullets flew towards him, but he dodged them with ease,

moving left and right like a blur. At that moment, he was almost like Mid-Nite, but even faster. His training had truly paid off.

Immortal fought them alone, his movements fluid and precise. He punched one officer after another, effortlessly dodging and rolling before moving on to the next. Each punch sent the operatives flying, crashing into nearby walls. He signaled for me to run with Mid-Nite as he prepared for his next move.

Ignoring the pain in my ankle, I grabbed Mid-Nite and watched as Immortal jumped high into the air. He came down with both fists clenched, slamming them into the ground with a force that caused a gigantic shockwave. The impact shattered every window in the building and blew everything and everyone around him away. The nearby wall cracked, and I knew it was my cue to run.

Despite the searing pain, I ran, dragging Mid-Nite along with me. We crashed through the broken wall and out into the streets. The cop cars were hot on our trail, but I managed to lose them by darting through the nearby alleyways. The adrenaline coursing through my veins kept me going, but I knew we weren't safe yet. I took a rest until the situation cooled off.



And that is how we got here. Two friends, arguing about whose fault it was. Everything had happened so quickly. In the end, we both sat beside Mid-Nite, tired and exhausted, unable to figure out what to do next. We couldn't take him to the hospital, as the cops would catch him, and we couldn't leave him here, as he was on the brink of death from the shock he had suffered.

At that moment, Immortal received a call from his mom. He hesitantly picked it up.

"Hello..."



"Hello Ahnaf, my boy!" An awfully familiar voice replied, sending a chill down Immortal's spine. It was Dr. Ramsey.

"Ramsey! WHAT ARE YOU DOING THERE?" Immortal replied in anger.

"Oh, nothing, I just came to have a late-night dinner, just like every year, haha."

"Cut the crap, what have you done to my mom? Where is she?"

"Oh, she is here along with your lovely girl, Kelly. Don't worry, I haven't done anything to them, but there is someone else you need to worry about... right?"

Immortal looked at Mid-Nite. "What do you want?"

"For the sake of old times, come home. You can't go to the hospital, and you can't let him die, right? I am the only option you've got..."

"Okay..."

Immortal quickly ran towards Mid-Nite. "No time to explain. Eric, quickly get him to my place. Dr. Ramsey will fix him!!!"

The urgency in Immortal's voice was clear. We had no other choice but to trust Dr. Ramsey, despite our reservations. I took a deep breath, gathered my strength, and prepared to move Mid-Nite to safety. The clock was ticking, and every second counted.

As we made our way through the darkened streets, the tension was palpable. Every shadow seemed to hide a potential threat, and every sound made us jump. The weight of Mid-Nite's limp body was heavy, but the adrenaline kept us moving.

"Eric, we need to be careful," Immortal whispered, his eyes scanning the surroundings. "Ramsey is unpredictable. We can't let our guard down."

I quickly wrapped my ankle with a piece of cloth nearby, grabbed Mid-Nite, and ran as fast as I could. The pain was excruciating, but I pushed through it because if I didn't, nobody else could. I reached Ahnaf's place in about two minutes and rang the doorbell frantically. Ms. Ruvana opened the door.

"Wha, who are yo... ERIC!!! What happened? Who is this? Where is Ahnaf? Where ha-"

"Aunty, please, there is no time to explain. Is Dr. Ramsey here?"

A voice came from inside, "Bring him in, quick!!!"

Ramsey and Ruvana took Mid-Nite into a nearby room and started mending his wounds. Kelly was sitting on the sofa, her face pale with shock. As the adrenaline left my body, I collapsed onto the sofa beside her. Shortly after, Ahnaf came in. Kelly ran to him and hugged him tightly.

"What happened, Ahnaf? What is going on? Ramsey was here, being all friendly, then Eric came with this man... I... I was so scared..."

Ahnaf held Kelly close, his eyes filled with a mix of anger and worry. "I know, Kelly. I know. It's been a nightmare. But we have to stay strong. Ramsey is our only hope right now."

Tears welled up in Kelly's eyes as she clung to Ahnaf. "I was so scared, Ahnaf. I thought we were going to lose you. I thought we were going to lose everyone."

Ahnaf gently stroked her hair, his voice soft but firm. "We're not going to lose anyone, Kelly. We're going to get through this. I promise."

I watched them, feeling a lump in my throat. The weight of the situation pressed down on me, and I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of responsibility. Mid-Nite's life was hanging by a thread, and we were placing our trust in a man we never knew.



Ahnaf looked at me lying on the sofa and said, "Kelly, Eric has injured his ankle. We need to help as much as we can until Ramsey is done with Mid-Nite."

Kelly nodded, her face still pale with worry. She and Ahnaf started working on my wound, carefully cleaning and bandaging it. The pain was intense, but their gentle care made it bearable. It was a long night, filled with tension and fear. The thought that one little misstep could cause such a huge disaster weighed heavily on all of us.

Ms. Ruvana could be seen coming out of the room with a bucket full of blood-stained bandages, her face etched with concern. The sight was a stark reminder of the gravity of the situation. We were all exhausted, both physically and emotionally.

As the night dragged on, we took turns keeping watch, our eyes heavy with fatigue. The house was filled with a tense silence, broken only by the occasional sound of Ramsey working on Mid-Nite. The minutes felt like hours, and the weight of uncertainty hung over us like a dark cloud.

Finally, as the first light of dawn began to filter through the windows, we allowed ourselves to rest. One by one, we drifted off to sleep, our bodies and minds craving the respite. The morning sun brought a glimmer of hope, but the challenges ahead were still daunting.

Ahnaf woke up from the sofa, his ears catching the faint sound of his mom crying from inside the room. His heart pounded as he quickly stood up and ran inside. There, he saw Ruvana, her face buried in Mid-Nite's hand, tears streaming down her cheeks. Mid-Nite looked at her with a sad expression, while Dr. Ramsey was nowhere to be seen, along with the documents Eric had brought. Mid-Nite lay on Mom's bed, a white blanket covering his body. He had a few stitches near his back, but he looked fine. His eyes met Ahnaf's, and he spoke softly.

"Hey kid, guess the good doctor did fix me up, huh?"

"Mom, what is going on? Why are you crying?" Ahnaf asked, his voice trembling.

Ruvana looked up, her eyes red and swollen. "You... you need to ask him... this man is..."

"Is? Is what? Do you know him?" Ahnaf's voice grew more urgent.

Mid-Nite looked at Ahnaf and smiled, a bittersweet expression on his face. It felt as if everything around him had stopped moving. I, along with Kelly, rushed inside the room, our hearts heavy with anticipation.

"Ahnaf... nice to meet you again," Mid-Nite said, his voice filled with emotion. "I am Zain, your father."

The room fell silent, the weight of his words hanging in the air. Ahnaf's eyes widened in shock, his mind racing to process the revelation. Tears welled up in his eyes as he took a step closer to the man he had known as Mid-Nite.

